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JEWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA

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THE JEWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA....



A Survey of the Records
at Present Existing in Charleston.

...BY...

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1695—1750.



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The Jews of South Carolina . . .



A Survey of the Records at Present Existing in Charleston.

To write an adequate and comprehensive history of the Jews of South Carolina today is a task of enormous difficulty. Not that there is any dearth of material to him who has the patience and the industry to go after it, but because many valuable documents are no longer in existence; and, furthermore, because a vast amount of material bearing upon the history of South Carolina during the Revolutionary period, and indirectly, therefore, upon that of the Jews, is at present hidden away in Columbia, where it will be some years before it will be available to the historian.

The oldest records of the Congregation Beth Elohim, too, have disappeared. Those which I recently recovered, valuable though they be, only date from 1800. The oldest records, with the exception of one volume, were no longer in existence in 1844, which fact was elicited in the examination of Solomon Valentine, the then Secretary of the Congregation in the trial of The State vs Ancker, of which I have written elsewhere. ("The Organ in the Synagogue," reprinted from The News and Courier, November, 1902.)

Even that one precious volume is gone. But in spite of this I think that we can obtain from the rich historical material still remaining in Charleston, a tolerably good glimpse in outline of the history of the Charleston Jewish community—enough

at least to enable some future and more capable worker in this field, to fill in the details and reconstruct it in its entirety. Personally, I can only hope to gather up a few scattered threads; and I shall, as far as possible, let the records speak for themselves.

The story of South Carolina is indeed a thrilling one. From 1670, when it was first settled, down to this day, it has been one long tale of glorious achievement. In not a few things has this State set the pace to her sister States, but in nothing may she feel a more justifiable pride than in the broad and liberal principles on which she was founded.

"In the year 1669," we read in the records, "the Lords 'did encourage severall people to come in their Vessells to inhabit this part of their province and with the said people did alsoe send Fundamll Lawes, Constitucons under the hands & Seales of six of their Lordshippes bearing date 21st July, '69, as the unalterable forme & rule of Governmt for ever.' "

(Langdon Cheves, Esq, in "Shaftesbury Papers"—Note to p 117.)

This Constitution of John Locke (1669,) was a veritable Magna Charta of liberty and tolerance. South Carolina started right. My chief concern being the Jews of South Carolina, I would especally call attention to Article 87 of that Constitution. It is to be found in the Shaftesbury Papers in the 5th volume of the Collections of the South Carolina Historical Society:

"87. But since ye natives of yt place who will be concernd in or. plantations are utterly strangers to Christianity, whose idollatry, ignorance, or mistake gives us noe right to expell or use ym. ill, & those who remove from other parts to plant there, will unavoydably be of diff-

rent opinions concerning matters of religion, ye liberty whereof they will expect to have allowed ym., & it will not be reasonable for us on this account to keep ym. out yt civil peace may be maintaind amidst ye diversity of opinions, & our agreement & compact with all men may be duly & faithfully observed, ye violation whereof upon what p'tence soever, cannot be without great offence to Almighty God, & great scandal to the true religion yt we p'fesse, & also yt heathens, Jues, and other dissenters from the purity of Christian religion may not be scared and kept at a distance from it, but by having an oppertunity of acquainting themselves with ye truth & reasonableness of its doctrines, & ye peaceableness & inoffensiveness of its professors, may by good usage and perswasion, & all those convincing methods of gentleness & meekness sutable to ye rules & designe of the Ghospel, be wone over to imbrace and unfeynedly receive ye truth. Therefore any seaven or more persons agreeing in any religion shall constitute a church or profession to wch. they shall give some name to distinguish it from others."

Little wonder, then, that the persecuted Jew, like the persecuted Huguenot and German Palatine, soon came here to find a haven of rest. To be undisturbed in the possession of "life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness," and to enjoy the privilege of worshipping God as his conscience dictated—these have ever been the ideals of the Jew, even as they were the ideals upon which this great Republic was established. For by far the greater part of his history, in every country, some or all of these "inalienable rights of man" have been denied him. Here he could have them all, and in fullest measure. South Carolina

welcomed him, welcomed him as a man, welcomed him as a brother; welcomed him as a citizen, and the Jew showed himself worthy of the confidence that was reposed in him. It is no idle boast to claim that there are none who have shed more lustre upon the annals of this State, or have done more towards its upbuilding, than have its Jewish citizens.

When did the Jews first come here and where did they come from? Thereby hangs an interesting tale.

In the Charleston Library there is a reprint of a unique volume entitled "A New Description of that Fertile and Pleasant Province of Carolina, by John Archdale, Late Governor of the Same." (London, 1707.) It was reprinted in Charleston in 1822. On page 22 there occurs the following interesting narrative:

"Now that the Reader may plainly discern, that the Almighty and Omniscient God, takes cognizance of Human Affairs, and directs them by a wise and prudent Chain of Causes, I shall relate some remarkable Passages that happened quickly after that I entered upon the Government, which was the 17th of August, 1695. There is a Nation of Indians call'd the Yammassees, who formerly lived under the Spanish Government, but now live under the English, about 80 Miles from Charles-Town. Some of these Indians going a Hunting, about 200 Miles to the Southward, met with some Spanish Indians that lived about Saneta Maria, not far from Augustine, the Seat of the Spanish Government; and taking them Prisoners, brought them Home, designing to sell them for Slaves to Barbadoes or Jamaica as was usual; but I understanding thereof, sent for their King, and ordered him to bring these Indians with him to Charles-Town, which

accordingly he did: There were three Men and one Woman; they could speak Spanish, and I had a Jew for an interpreter, so upon examination, I found they profess'd the Christian Religion as the Papists do; upon which I thought in a most peculiar manner, they ought to be freed from Slavery; and thereupon order'd the King to carry them to Augustine to the Spanish Governour with a Letter, desiring an Answer relating to the receipt of them; who having receiv'd them; sent me the following Letter: So far as relates to this Affair, I copy it forth:"

(Here follows the letter, which is of no interest to our investigation.)

Who was this Jew who lived in Charles-Town in the year 1695? Can we find him elsewhere? Were there others here at that early date? The records will help us.

In the Probate Records, 1694-1704, p. 133, Abraham Avilah, of Charles Towne, in ye County of Berkley and Province of Carolina, "for divers good causes and considerations me at this time especially moving and more especially out of trust and confidence which I repose in Mr Simon Valentine M-cht, make him my true and lawfull attorney." This Power of Attorney is dated March 25, 1698.

We meet with this Simon Valentine several times in the old records. He writes his name Simon Valentyn. On page 339 of the same volume, Jacob Mears, of ye Parish of Port Royall, in ye Island aforesaid (Jamaica,) appoints "his trusty friend William Smith, of Carolina, merchant, his true and lawfull Attorney, to demand of Simon Valentine, of Carolina, shopkeeper, all and every such Debt and Debts, Sum and Sums &c, as may be owing to him." This deed is dated July 3, 1701. His name

also appears on p. 410, on a document dated January 24, 1704. In the volume, 1692-3, we find him several times as a surety on administration bonds. His name occurs on pp 248, 256, 280 and 357. The earliest of these documents bears the date of 1696.

The last reference to this Simon Valentine is interesting, as it is the earliest record here of a Jew holding land. In the volume of Miscellaneous Records, 1714-1717, (p. 233,) there is a record of a mortgage of a farm of 350 acres from Mordicai Nathan to Henry Peronneau which land, the deed tells us, "was formerly purchased by the said Mordicai Nathan and Symond Valentine, Deceased, being Joyn purchasers, whom the said Mordicai has survived." It may be explained here, that according to the old law, when two people bought a piece of land in common, should one of them die, the land belonged to the survivor. This law has since been repealed by Statute.

The next document of interest is an old will, that is to be found in the volume, "Wills, 1671-1727."

Abraham Isack, of Cyty of New Yorke, "being bound to sea, and therefore being present in good health, but not knowing when it may please the Almighty God to take me out of ye world," makes his will. It is dated May 26, 1709, and was recorded in Charleston February 20, 1710.

It is now some years before the records make further mention of Jews. In 1739 we find two documents concerning Joseph Tobias, Shopkeeper—one a lease and the other a transfer of property. They are to be found in the Mesne Conveyance Records. (W. 471 and PP 696.) We find this same Joseph Tobias in one of the inventories of an estate. (Mesne Conveyance, 1749-50, p. 75.)

The last of the records that I have been

able to find occurs in the Probate Records for 1736-40. On p. 3 there is a letter from New York, dated November 25, 1743, and addressed to Messrs Daniel and Thomas La Roche, of Charleston. Mr Jacob Frank refers to his nephew, Mr Moses Solomons, and some difficulty which the said Moses Solomons had had with some London shipping house. On the next page David Franks, of Charles Town, Gent, declares that the letter signed Jacob Frank is the handwriting of his father. It would seem from another letter here recorded that Franks had connections in Lisbon. On page 300 there is a bond of Samuel Levy and Moses Salamons, of Charlestown, merchants, to Daniel La Roche & Thomas La Roche, of Wlnyau, for £2,605.6.8.

Leaving the records let us now look at the Jews of early South Carolina, in their private life. As we have seen, the Jew here has never labored under any civil or religious disability whatsoever. As early as 1703 it is on record that Jews voted at the popular election for members of the Commons House of Assembly. This toleration on the part of the Established Church party in South Carolina brought forth a protest from the bigoted Dissenters of that day, who complained that "At this last election, Jews strangers, sailors servants, negroes and almost every Frenchman in Craven and Berkeley counties came down to elect, and their votes were taken; the persons by them voted for were returned by the Sheriff."

(Rivers, "South Carolina," quoted by McCrady in "South Carolina Under the Proprietary Government," p. 391.)

It is a pity that we cannot get a glance at the answer to this protest. It would be interesting, indeed, but it is unfortunately not available.

The next point of interest in our inves-

tigation is the question of how the Jews made a living in those early days. Here the Gazettes will help us.

There were exceedingly few professional men in the Province in those days—doctors, lawyers and clergymen. With the exception of a few handicraftsmen and planters, the entire population subsisted by trade. Competition must have been very keen, for everybody seems to have had almost the same things for sale and to have advertised them in the very same way. Let us look at the advertisements in the South Carolina Gazettes, between the years 1731 and 1750.

The earliest Jewish names that I have found in the Gazettes occur in an advertisement of August 17, 1734, when Messrs Carvallo & Gutteres announce that they "have to dispose of "Good Old Barbados Rum. Good Madera Wine. Muscovado Sugar & Limejuice; Likewise some dry goods, &c, living in Church street, where formerly the printing office was." I am not quite certain that these were Jews.

In the Gazette of November 22, 1735, Mr Carvallo advertises for sale "a very good Rhode Island Pacing-Horse."

On September 14, 1738, Isaac De Pas in Union street offers to sell "Good White Sugar, very good Barbados Rum & very fine Citron Water," etc, etc. On February 20, 1744, he advertises his wares at his shop on Broad street, and on March 19, 1744, he announces to his patrons that "All gentlemen that have rice to dispose of may have two Parts in ready Cash and the Balance in Cordials of all sorts or any other goods that I have to sell."

On August 25, 1739, we read the following: "To Be Sold in Union St, by Moses de Mattos, White, Milk, Ship, Middling & Brown Bread & Loaf Sugar. The same

may be had of Mr Tobias on the Bay. Also good Esopus Flour." He is still in Union street, on November 1, 1742.

In the Gazette of April 3, 1742, there is an announcement of the "Half-Yearly Festival of the right worthy & amicable Order of UBIQUARIANS. Moses Solomon, Esq, is one of the Aedils.

On December 16, 1745, Solomon Isaacs advertises as the administrator of an estate, and on the same date Joseph Tobias announces that as he intends to leave the Province in March, he would like those indebted to him to come and settle. In the meantime, "I have most kinds of Cordial Drams to sell by Wholesale or Retail, Checks, Oznabrugs, hard Ware, Linnens & sundry other Goods.

The last advertisement is that of Solomon Isaacs & Co, on October 10, 1748. They offer for sale Negro Cloth, woollen and linen goods, etc, "at the House on the Bay, in which Capt Colcock lives."

So far the Records and the Gazettes. Summing up, then, our inquiry thus far We have found a Jew in Charleston in 1695. I believe that he came from Jamaica, where Jews have lived from a very early date. We also found other Jews here before 1700. I believe that they came from London. We have followed the Jew in his daily life and as a citizen. We have seen how, socially and religiously, he was at peace with his neighbors. He lived the same life and followed the same occupations that they did, taking his full part in the burdens as well as in the privileges of citizenship.

There were other Jews in Charleston in the year 1750. Of these I shall tell in my next article. Till now, it is the Records in Charleston that have been speaking.

THE DAGGETT PRINTING CO.,
CHARLESTON, S. C.



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